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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 011207

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: URIBE ASKS VATICAN TO BROKER PRISONER EXCHANGE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

GOC Proposes Limited Humanitarian Exchange with FARC

1. (SBU) On October 28, GOC High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo wrote an open letter to Papal Nuncio Beniamino Stella proposing that the Catholic Church mediate an exchange of 15 prisoners from both the GOC and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Face-to-face negotiations between representatives of the GOC and FARC over a broader exchange would follow. Restrepo's letter sent under Uribe's instructions is the latest iteration of GOC efforts to reach an exchange agreement with the FARC. Although both sides have expressed interest in an exchange, neither has been willing to cede on key preconditions for talks, such as the GOC's insistence that released FARC fighters not return to terrorist ranks, or the FARC's requirement that the GOC temporarily withdraw security forces from two southeastern municipalities.

2. (C) Father Dario Echeverri (strictly protect), chairman of the Roman Catholic Church's National Conciliation Commission, told Embassy poloffs that the exchange proposal was generated in an October 27 meeting between three Church officials -- he, Archbishop of Medellin Luis Augusto Castro, and Cardinal Pedro Rubiano -- and Restrepo. Echeverri said the Papal Nuncio, who is out of the country, responded favorably to the proposal in an October 28 conversation, but would need authorization from the Vatican to take on such a formal role. Echeverri also noted that before the FARC would be likely to consider the proposal, the GOC would have to formally deliver it to FARC leaders. This would most likely be done through the Church or the Swiss Embassy, neither of which, to Echeverri's knowledge, has been asked to do so. Swiss Embassy officials welcomed the Church's possible role as a mediator, and hinted that, should the talks materialize, they would likely take place in their embassy or the Holy See's.

GOC Prisoner Exchange Proposal

3. (U) Begin informal translation:

Bogota, October 28, 2004

Monsignor Beniamino Stella
Apostolic Nuncio of His Holiness

Your Excellency:

The Colombian government appreciates the Catholic Church's efforts in the search for a Humanitarian Accord that would allow us to free FARC hostages and permit their speedy return home.

Mr. Nuncio, before you the government ratifies its will to advance a humanitarian accord according to the terms expressed to the Swiss government on July 23, 2004, made public on August 18:

"The Government will unilaterally free, in accordance with Colombian laws, fifty guerrillas charged or found guilty of rebellion and offer them the opportunity to be reincorporated into society. They will be offered two options: leave Colombia or remain in Colombia and participate in the National Government's reinsertion program. These options will be extended under the auspices of the French government and Colombian Church.

Subsequently, the guerrillas will free the political hostages and the members of the Public Forces currently being held. The release will be coordinated with the support of the Swiss, the French and the International Red Cross.

To advance the creation of this agreement of intent, the national government proposes the following procedure:

-- Reiterating the government's offer to free 15 guerrillas jailed for rebellion.

-- The guerrillas will subsequently release, as proof of good will, a similar number of hostages.

-- Immediately following the release, the government will meet with the FARC in an embassy in Bogota. The Apostolic Nunciature of Colombia could be used for negotiations.

-- The meeting will not exceed a period of five days and will only attempt to reach a prisoner exchange agreement.

-- The International Red Cross may transport the FARC members to and from Bogota with the support of the Colombian Church.

-- Military actions will not be suspended in any part of the national territory.

Excellency: If the proposal is accepted, we hope we can depend on your valiant cooperation to move this new effort forward and relieve the suffering of those kidnapped and their families."

End text.

14. (C) Comment: The GOC's repeated attempts over the past several months to reach an exchange agreement with the FARC are a reflection of increased public interest, pressure from the families of hostages, a public campaign for an exchange by former President Samper, and the government's sincere desire to get prisoners released if it can do so without damaging its anti-terror efforts. At the same time, it would be surprising if the FARC took any step that would bolster the Uribe Administration. End comment.

WOOD